

Until You've Found Some Kind of Friend by LeftHandOfSnarkness

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Summary:

"Follow me, Kid" John says, and Jim does, because what else can he do?

Until You've Found Some Kind of Friend

Everyone I've ever known has wished me well
Anyway, that's how it seems, it's hard to tell
Maybe people only ask you how you're doing
'Cause that's easier than letting on how little they
could care
But when you know that you've got a real friend
somewhere
Suddenly all the others are so much easier to bear

-Jackson Browne "The Late Show"

Johnny still comes to see Jim, sometimes. There's no rhyme or reason to it, just a stop he is making as he drives from who-the-hell-knows to god-only-knows-where in that obnoxious car of his. Jim isn't exactly sure what his friend even does for a living (he knew, before Mary, he'd been a mechanic, but that can't be what he does now; you don't travel for work as a mechanic), he asked once and got some half-assed answer that John didn't really seem to care if he bought. Before all the weirdness went down in Hawkins, before the monsters and missing girls and government conspiracies, he'd thought John had just kind of lost it. That was something Jim could understand- he'd lost it, too, when the perfect little life he'd built for himself had fallen apart. They both drank too much, drove too fast, had an edge to them that they hadn't had, even after Viet Nam. He's not so sure that's it, now, not so sure John Winchester is just the flesh and blood man he appears to be.

"Go find Winchester, kid", is what the bored-looking NCO had told cherry PV2 James Hopper, when he got to what they were generously calling a fire base somewhere in the middle of the jungle. "He'll get you squared away". And Jim had gone and found him, the dark-haired Lance Corporal with the big blue eyes and a wicked grin. Winchester had thrown an arm around him and said *Stick close to me, kid, and you'll be alright*. And so for two years he'd followed John. Walked patrols behind him- Jim with his head on a swivel and John in front of him, M249 slung over his shoulders like he couldn't be bothered to carry it properly, like it didn't weigh anything, like he

didn't think they'd ever be attacked. He'd followed him to bars they weren't supposed to be in and where they drank too much and smoked too much and laughed too much. He'd followed him, stumbling and half-asleep, into bunkers when mortars began to rain down in the middle of the night, and John would smile in the dim light and say *can you believe this shit?* as if it was just a mild inconvenience, as if they didn't live in the valley of the shadow of death. He'd followed him on to the chopper that had landed one day with their names on it, lifted them up like they were in the palm of an angel and flown them to Da Nang, to catch a boat back to the world and leave Viet Nam behind like it was just a bad dream. *Stick close and you'll be alright*, John always said, and Jim had done just that.

After the first time shit had gone south in his sleepy little town, John had dropped in. He'd just been there when Jim came home, leaning against that shiny black car he loved so much, waiting. He'd smiled and pulled Jim into a rough hug- his eyes still crinkled at the corners the same way they'd had when he'd been 19, and said "How the hell are you, kid?" like there wasn't barely a year age difference between them, and Jim melts, finally feels like things might work out after all. *Stick close, kid, and I'll make sure you are alright* John had said, once, twice, a hundred times, and Jim had tripped over himself to make sure he did- because John was one of those people who seemed to have god on his side. Not enough- never enough to keep him from being surrounded by evil- but enough to make sure it never touched him. And if he... if Jim could just get close enough, maybe some of that would rub off on him, would keep him safe by proxy. And when the monsters came, so did John- like something out of a dream or a myth or a prayer- to fight against them without even the courtesy of being surprised. He was there when the monsters appeared in Viet Nam, and when they appeared in the bottom of a bottle, and when they appeared in Hawkins, Indiana. *Stick close, kid* rattled in his brain like a ceiling fan, easing him to sleep, blocking out the ringing in his head. *Stick close and nothing bad will get you.*

In the times when John was gone, it occurred to Jim that maybe John wasn't someone that evil never touched, but was maybe someone that brought evil with him. That was an easy thing to think, when he wasn't here to slap him on the back and call him kid and

bump their shoulders together, when there was only booze and pills and adrenaline to keep him alive. "The devil appears as an angel of light," the preacher had said on one of the Sundays that Jim had stumbled to church when his life was going to shit and he didn't know where else to turn. And that described Johnny- who always seemed to have the sun behind him, backlit by it's glow, alive with it's warmth, setting fire to everything around him. But it was different when John was there. "God helps those who helps themselves" a different preacher had said, on a different Sunday, but to the same stumbling Jim. *Stick close to me, kid, and we will get through this, get out onto the other side.* He hears his voice in his head long before the man himself shows up, guns and eyes blazing with righteous fury. And then he is there, like he has always been, back pressed against his, the same words he'd been repeating for 5, 10, 20 years now floating between them. Jim thinks that maybe sticking close to John is the best chance- the only chance- he has of helping himself. Because he is a sinner in the hands of an angry god, and Johnny is the only thing that stops him from being dropped directly into the flames. And so Jim follows, because there is nothing else to do, because Johnny is the only person who has ever promised him something and kept his word, no matter how impossible it seemed at the time.

Stick with me, kid, and we will crush these monsters beneath our heels.

Author's Note:

The title and quote from the beginning are both from the Late, Great Jackson Browne's "The Late Show"

Nothing belongs to me, John Winchester and Jim Hopper live rent free in my head.